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Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Summary: Chapter VI

The Underground Man wakes up after having slept with the young prostitute. He hears a clock wheezing, and he takes in the details of the dirty, narrow room where he has been sleeping. He remembers the events of the previous day as if they had happened a long time ago, and slowly he begins to feel anguished. Next to him, the prostitute opens her eyes and looks at him with indifferent curiosity. The Underground Man realizes that he has never spoken to her, and he suddenly feels disgusted with the idea of sex without any kind of love. They stare at each other, and the Underground Man becomes uncomfortable.

To break the silence, the Underground Man asks the prostitute's name, and she tells him that it is Liza. He continues to ask her about her background, but she seems unwilling to elaborate. Suddenly, he begins to tell her the story of a prostitute who died in a basement and whose former clients drank to her memory in a tavern. He then launches into a long, moralizing speech about the shamefulness of prostitution as a profession.

This lecture clearly moves Liza. The Underground Man becomes fascinated by the idea that he can elicit emotion in her. He feels that doing so indicates that he has some power over her. At the same time, he is genuinely interested in her, and feels emotionally unstable himself. He waxes sentimental about the value of family, describing the love he would feel for his daughter if he had one. When Liza implies that her own family may have sold her into prostitution, the Underground Man launches into a long speech about the value of marriage and the happiness it can bring. At the end of his speech, he tells Liza how much he loves little children, painting a glowing picture

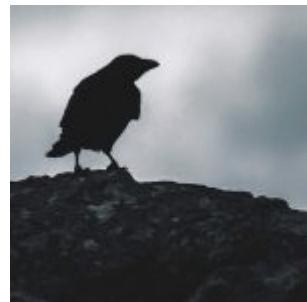
of a young mother and father with a plump, rosy baby. The Underground Man imagines that this picture will convince Liza to stop being a prostitute, but after he finishes his speech, he worries that she will laugh at him.

When Liza begins to speak, the Underground Man encourages her tenderly, but she tells him that his speech sounds like it was taken from a book. He is offended. In retrospect, he convinces himself that Liza's mockery was only a form of self-defense, and that she was genuinely moved by his speech. But at the moment he has not yet come to this revelation, and a "wicked feeling" comes over him.

Summary: Chapter VII

The Underground Man defends himself against Liza's statement that his speech sounds like it was borrowed from a book. To the contrary, he says, the speech rose up in his soul in response to the baseness of Liza's situation. He feels vile for being with her because she is a prostitute. However, if she lived a purer life in a better place, he says, he might fall in love with her and accord her the respect that is denied a prostitute. He tries to convey to her how shameful and sordid her situation is. As a prostitute, she is throwing away her youth, her virtue, and her health. He continues his speech in brutal fashion, describing in detail Liza's inevitable death from consumption, predicting how ill-treated and friendless she will be in her illness, and how little respect she will get in death, as no one will mourn her.

The Underground Man gets so carried away in his speech that it takes him a while to realize that Liza is in complete despair, sobbing convulsively into her pillow. Suddenly horrified, he starts to get ready to leave. When he lights a candle, however, Liza gets up with a "half-crazed smile" and looks at him. He takes her hands and gives her his address, telling her to come to him. She promises to come, and he says goodbye to her.

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